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SUBJECT: NEW FM - A CAREER DIPLOMAT, TRUSTED BY PRESIDENT BASESCU

REF: 09 BUCHAREST 863

Classified By: CDA Jeri Guthrie-Corn, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Teodor Baconschi, 47, was confirmed by the Romanian Parliament as Minister of Foreign Affairs on December 23, 2009. President Traian Basescu himself pushed Prime Minister Emil Boc to choose Baconschi for the job rather than incumbent MFA State Secretary Bogdan Aurescu who was put forward as a FM designate in two previous governmental line-ups that were turned down or not considered by the Parliament prior to the December presidential elections.

¶2. (SBU) During the swearing in ceremony, President Basescu said he chose an "experienced" diplomat as Foreign Minister to send a strong signal that "this position is not for politicians." (Note: Bogdan Aurescu is also a career diplomat by lacks the ambassadorial experience and familiarity with Basescu that favored Baconschi.) President Basescu worked closely with Baconschi in the past and has first-hand knowledge of Baconschi's diplomatic skills: Baconschi served as MFA State Secretary for Global Affairs (January 2005 - September 2006) and as senior Presidential Advisor (October 2006 - August 2007). In September 2007 President Traian Basescu appointed Baconschi the Romanian Ambassador to Paris, a position Baconschi left upon taking the helm at the Foreign Ministry.

¶3. (SBU) Baconschi joined the Romanian Foreign Service in 1997 and was granted the rank of Ambassador in 2006. He served as Ambassador to the Vatican (1997-2001) and, after a short stay in Bucharest as MFA Director of Culture and Romanian Communities, Ambassador to Lisbon (2002-2004). Baconschi was instrumental in convincing Pope John Paul II to visit Romania, his first visit to a predominantly Christian Orthodox country, in 1999. The Pope's visit to Romania and his discussions with the Romanian Patriarch were seen as a diplomatic success. As Ambassador to Paris, Baconschi can be credited with upgrading the bilateral Romanian-French relationship to a "strategic partnership." (Note: French President Nicolas Sarkozy visited Romania in February 2008 to join President Basescu in signing a joint statement creating the strategic partnership between the two countries. End Note)

¶4. (SBU) Andrei Plesu, former Minister of Culture (1990-1991), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1997-1999) and Basescu's first Presidential Advisor for Foreign Affairs (2005) is reputedly Baconschi's first major sponsor. Plesu convinced Baconschi to become a diplomat and chose him to be the representative to the Vatican in 1997. Plesu also convinced President Basescu that Baconschi would be a good MFA State Secretary in early 2005. Baconschi was Plesu's advisor when the latter was Minister of Culture in the early 1990s.

¶5. (U) Before 1989, Baconschi worked as a copy editor for a

publishing house run by the Biblical Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Before joining the Romanian Foreign Service, Baconschi headed a small publishing house, served as editor-in-chief of Romanian public television's "Spiritual Life" department, and delivered lectures on religious anthropology at the Philosophy Faculty of Bucharest University.

**¶6.** (U) Baconschi's studies include a BA in Orthodox Theology from the Bucharest-based Theological Institute (1985), a MA (1991) and a PhD (1994) in Religious Anthropology and Comparative History of Religions from the University of Paris-Sorbonne. He also graduated from the fellowship program at the New Europe College, a Bucharest-based institute established and headed by Andrei Plesu.

**¶7.** (U) His writings and public appearances, often under the pen name Teodor Baconsky, (Note: the family name was made famous by his father, Romanian poet A.E. Baconsky, who died in the 1977 Bucharest earthquake. End note.) include over ten volumes of studies and essays, a constant presence in the cultural media, and at conferences held by several European universities. He is a member of the International Association for Patristic Studies (Paris) and of the Bucharest-based Group for Social Dialogue. He was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Pius IX (Vatican), the Grand Officer of the Order of Saint Agatha (the Republic of San Marino), Grand Officer of the Order of Merit (Portugal) and Officer of the Order of "Loyal Service" (Romania). Baconschi speaks fluent French, English and Italian.

**¶8.** (C) Comment: President Basescu's choice of a career diplomat whom he personally trusts is a strong indication of his determination to keep foreign affairs outside of the reach of political parties. With this choice the President reaffirms his role as the driving force of Romanian foreign policy after a year of political interference from the previous coalition partner, and now opposition, Social Democratic Party and former PSD Foreign Minister Cristian Diaconescu.

**¶9.** (C) While generally sympathetic to the issues important to the U.S. Embassy, Baconschi has shown himself to be a strong defender of the Romanian Orthodox church and is unsympathetic to complaints by minority religions in the country. Post was disappointed by Baconschi in December of 2006 when he assured the Embassy that a draft Law on Religion would not be approved and promised to inform the Embassy of any developments. The law, which favored the Orthodox Church over all others, and explicitly excluded smaller churches from Government support and tax exempt status, was quickly passed by the Parliament and signed by the President in the last week of the year. Nonetheless, Baconschi has been labeled as "helpful" on the vast majority of issues by former Embassy officials who worked with him. These former officials describe him as a center-right intellectual who is deeply anti-Communist and "firmly committed to a strong bilateral relationship and trans-Atlanticism more generally." End comment.

GUTHRIE-CORN